

THE NEED FOR PRESENTATION

by Ray C. Stedman

The sixteenth chapter of Leviticus is the conclusion of the first great section of this book. We have been looking at God's provisions to meet his people's needs. How like a Heavenly Father he watches over us, his people, with tender, compassionate care! How intimately he is concerned with every detail of life, even the most trivial, even matters of diet and clothing and how to treat apparently rather insignificant diseases. The fact that all this has counterparts in our spiritual life is a tremendous encouragement to us to walk in faith and to draw upon his resources.

If an earthly father sits down to figure out the budget to meet his family needs he usually puts aside so much for rent, for food, and for clothes, so much for education, for recreation, and for other essentials -- *TV Guide*, etc. But God does it quite differently. When he determined the essentials and made provision for them, as you notice he stresses through this book, he set aside so much to provide for love, for joy, for peace, and for forgiveness, so much for companionship, for understanding, and for guidance. These are the essentials as God sees them.

You remember that in the Sermon on the Mount when our Lord Jesus is setting forth the secrets of life he goes through a list of things that men seek for, and he says to his own, "I don't want you to be anxious about what you shall eat or drink or how you are going to be clothed. But," he says, "the essential thing is: seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness -- these necessary things of the spirit," and then almost with a touch of disdain he adds, "and all these other things will be added unto you" {cf, Matt 6:31-33}.

How we have reversed that! We spend our time and energy thinking about how to get money to provide food and clothing and education and so on, and we have just a little time left over for the essentials. No wonder life often goes awry! No wonder so much of it is lived backward! But once again, we are called by God to put life back in balance and to give attention to these relationships with one another, to the love and the peace and the joy of our lives, and then these other things will find adequate place without any struggle. They will come not out of any automatic provision but out of the normal workings of life.

As we have gone through this book together God has taught us, first of all, the need for a substitute. Despite all the accumulation of human knowledge we cannot handle life adequately by ourselves. The offerings taught us that. We need a substitute beyond humanity, a divine substitute, one who took our place. And this we find in Jesus Christ. And then, because we don't understand the mysteries of our existence apart from someone who can explain them and apply them to us, we need a great high priest. That too is met in Christ. Then we need a standard, something to measure life by, to tell us the difference between what will hurt us and what will help us, what will advance us and what will destroy us. We need God's gracious word to understand what confronts us in life and thus to be able to distinguish between right and wrong and good and evil. That is not easy to do, but God has provided a standard. Finally, we come now in this chapter to what the Jews to this day call Yom Kippur, the great Day of Atonement, the high point of the year in the life of Israel.

I have struggled for several weeks over what to title this message. I have changed my mind several times because it is hard to focus precisely on what this chapter is driving at. But finally as I worked this passage through I came to see that the great thing God is after here, the ultimate end of all his working in our lives, is to bring us to a "presentation" of ourselves before him, to meet our need to appear in a face to face encounter with the living God, to come before his presence in a satisfying communion which fills every aching void of our lives.

If I could read your hearts I am sure that deep within you I would find a hunger and a cry after that very thing. That is what accounts for the restlessness of humanity. It is the cry of the human spirit for the face of God. Nothing is more confirmatory of the fact that man is a creature flung from the hand and heart of God. We can never forget the fact that one day long ago we humans were made to walk in daily fellowship in the cool of the

garden with a living God. We still long for that, and no human relationship can quite satisfy that yearning. We have all found that even the nearest and dearest to us can go only so far in meeting that desire. Then their efforts begin to fade and a void is left unfulfilled. That void, that cry for something more than your dearest companion can give you, is the cry of your spirit for the face of God. Remember how beautifully David puts this in the 27th Psalm. He says to God,

**Thou hast said, "Seek ye my face."
My heart says to thee,
"Thy face, Lord, do I seek."
Hide not thy face from me. {Psa 27:8-9 RSV}**

The difficulty we all have with this is the ease with which all the sin and evil and the shameful habits of our life cloud and veil us from the face of God, the ease by which the memory of what we have done and been comes back to haunt us and to disturb our sense of boldness and confidence in coming to God. In other words, we have a troubled conscience. But the ultimate end of God's work with us is to give us a clear conscience. That is what he is after -- a clear conscience -- before him and before men. This is what is so beautifully taught us in this passage.

We have seen how God has provided for cleansing from the uprising of leprosy within us. Remember that leprosy is a picture of sin in its blatant, open manifestations, of obvious forms of evil. And we have seen how he has also provided for cleansing from the discharges which come from within, the unavoidable expressions of a fallen nature that we experience from time to time. But now he is coming to the delicate matter of how to rid us of that sense of defilement which is on our consciences and which persists even though we know we have been forgiven.

I find so many Christians struggling at this point. They say, "I know that God has forgiven me. I know that the Word is true, that he has paid the debt for my sins. And yet I seem to feel so guilty all the time, so haunted, and I feel ashamed to come to God. I feel that I am unworthy." And they wrestle with these problems and are troubled by thoughts which come to them even while they are trying to pray. This is Satan's favorite ground of attack upon us. But this is what God is dealing with on the great Day of Atonement. This is the final matter to be settled which would otherwise exclude us from the presence of God.

Notice the beautiful provisions that God has made, as taught in these pictures and types of Chapter 16. Verses 1-2:

The Lord spoke to Moses, after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the Lord and died; and the Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at all times into the holy place within the veil, before the mercy seat which is upon the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat." {Lev 16:1-2 RSV}

No greater privilege was ever given to Aaron the high priest than to be able to come before the very presence of God in the holy of holies as the shining presence of the Shekinah glory of God hung above the mercy seat. And yet God says, "Don't come at all times. Come only once a year." That limitation grew out of the fear aroused in the hearts of Aaron and the rest of the priests by the death of Aaron's two sons. You remember that in an earlier study we had the story of how they had brought "strange fire" before the Lord and thus were suddenly burned up by a flash of flame from the Shekinah glory of God. This had made Aaron and his other two sons afraid. Who wouldn't have been afraid?

I have often thought that these priests of old, when they realized that they were dealing with a God of righteousness and justice, had to be so careful that they did what he prescribed that they probably made up check lists like ones pilots use before they take off. I know I would have had up my sleeve a little card of certain items that I could check off to be sure that everything was right. And this feeling of fear imparted a sense of inhibition, of uncertainty, in coming before God's presence.

But even here, under the Law, with its shadows and its types, God gives a special provision by which the

whole nation, in the person of the high priest, once a year at least, could come openly and boldly before the very presence of God himself, without any sense of fear. The priest could come once a year confidently into the holy of holies. This is a picture for us of what we are to do continuously in Christ, as you will see as we go further on in this story.

Notice what the priest had to do. There are seven steps in the process. The first is found in Verses 3-4:

"But thus shall Aaron come into the holy place. with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He shall put on the holy linen coat, and shall have the linen breeches on his body, be girded with the linen girdle, and wear the linen turban, these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water, and then put them on." {Lev 16:3-4 RSV}

Step number one was to bathe himself and put on the linen garments. You remember that earlier in the book we had a listing of the garments the high priest wore. They were these inner garments made of linen, and then on top of them there was a great robe of beauty and glory with the bells around its hem, and over that the ephod, a sort of vest, and finally a breastplate. But all the outer garments were to be laid aside when the priest went in to the holy of holies.

Perhaps you have heard messages by preachers who have taught that when the high priest went into the holy of holies the people were able to tell whether he was still alive or not by listening for the tinkling of the bells on the hem of his robe. I have heard preachers describe with dramatic emphasis how the whole crowd waited with bated breath outside the tabernacle and listened to hear the bells, because they knew that the high priest would be struck dead if anything were wrong, if everything had not been confessed in the camp of Israel. Well, that is so much homiletical hogwash, because the high priest did not wear the robe with the bells into the holy of holies. He wore only the linen garments.

As we have already seen, those linen garments were a picture of the personal, private righteousness of the Lord Jesus, the inner righteousness which only God can see, not the public display of his sinlessness but that inner righteousness of his thoughts, his attitudes, his reactions. In all of the life of the Lord upon the earth there was not one moment when that inner righteousness was not perfect. Never once was there a yielding to the pressure upon him to give way to playing with filthy thoughts. He was normal, and he experienced every temptation such as we do, but never once did he give way. This is God's way of teaching us that as we come before his presence we are to come clothed with the inner righteousness of Jesus Christ, so that our inner life is as acceptable to God as our outer life. Both have been cleansed by the blood of his death on our behalf for our sins -- the visible sins that we have committed, and the secret sins of the heart. The ground on which we stand is Jesus' righteousness, not ours. This is the first step.

After this the priest was to offer the sacrifices, Verses 5-6:

"And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel [notice] two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

"And Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house." {Lev 16:5-6 RSV}

Here is the provision made for the fact that Aaron was not, like Christ, without sin. He was merely a shadow, a picture of Christ, but was himself a sinful man like we are. And so he had to offer sacrifices for himself which, we are told in Hebrews 7, were not necessary for Christ. Jesus needed no sacrifice for himself.

And then comes the requirement regarding the two goats, Verse 7:

"Then he shall take the two goats, and set them before the Lord at the door of the tent of meeting; and Aaron shall cast lots [almost like flipping a coin] upon the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other for Azazel." {Lev 16:7-8 RSV}

Azazel is a name which many have been troubled and concerned about. Many scholars have debated its

meaning. But the consensus seems to be that this is one of the names for Satan. So one goat was to be chosen for the Lord and the other for Satan. We will see why in a moment, Verses 9-10:

**"And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord, and offer it as a sin offering; but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel."
{Lev 16:9-10 RSV}**

It is important to note in passing that the goat was not named Azazel. The goat was not Satan. There are cults which teach that the goat represents Satan and that therefore Satan is the ultimate sin-bearer. But that is not true. The Goat was sent to Satan, and the sins that were placed on it, as we shall see, were placed there to be sent to Satan.

But first we are concerned with the goat for the Lord. This goat marks the stake, if I may use that term, that God has in the crucifixion of Jesus. When we consider the death of Jesus we almost always think of it as on our own behalf. That is, we were forgiven there. His life was poured out on our behalf and, quite properly, from that event we count our forgiveness and acceptance before God. But what this is teaching us is that God also had a stake in the death of Jesus, that God was blessed and glorified and magnified in that death.

If you think about it you can see why. You see, forgiveness is not an easy thing for God to display. He can't do as many people seem to think he can -- simply look at our evil and say, "Oh, well, that's all right. Forget about it. I love you anyway. Just go on." If that were the way that we are forgiven then God would deny his character as a just God. But God is just and, in a sense, his justice struggles with his love. God's justice says, "Everyone who deliberately commits transgressions must be set aside from my presence. He cannot come before me." This book teaches that again and again. God's justice excludes us from his presence and sends us away. If God were just, and only just, he would wipe out the human race without exception. Not one of us could stand.

But God's love doesn't want to do that. Yet how can his love be expressed unless his justice is satisfied? That is what the death of Christ does. When God's Son hung on the cross God did not spare him a thing! He poured out upon him every bit of his wrath against sin. Every bit of his justice was satisfied in the death of his Son upon the cross. Thus God is vindicated. The whole world can now look at that event and say, "Yes, God is just -- even though he loves us." The death of Jesus freed God to show his love to us. Apart from his death you and I would never have known that he is a God of mercy, of compassion, and of tender, forgiving grace. We would never have seen that he is willing to suffer for us on our behalf, that he had that kind of heart. Thus God himself is magnified, his character is glorified before us, by the death of Jesus. And this is what is portrayed by the goat that was for the Lord. It was on his behalf that this goat was to be sacrificed.

In Verses 11-14 we have the details of Aaron's sacrifice of the bull for himself:

"Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house; he shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small; and he shall bring it within the veil [right into the holy of holies, right before the presence of God] and put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat which is upon the testimony, lest he die; and he shall take some of the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle the blood with his finger seven times" [the number of perfection, completion, absolute satisfaction]. {Lev 16:11-14 RSV}

By this God is saying, "The sacrifice of the life of the Lord Jesus on your behalf has rendered you as though you had about you the sweet smell of Jesus Christ himself." When we come before his presence God smells that sweetness of Christ, and does not smell us. This is the first deodorant used in Scripture! This is the way by which the evil odor of our own failure is eliminated and the sweetness of Jesus Christ is substituted on our behalf. And this is what we are to remember when we come before God in prayer at any time. It is beautifully expressed in a quote that I ran across recently, by an unknown author:

Scripture recognizes, as the accuser [Satan] does also, that nothing so impedes your access to God as a guilty conscience. You can't draw near boldly unless your heart is sprinkled from an evil conscience. Therefore, if you want to overcome Satan at this point, don't just talk to him about the blood of Christ. Instead, accept the fact that the blood of Christ completely satisfies God about you. Remind yourself that God welcomes you into his presence not on the grounds of your Christian progress, the depth of your knowledge, nor even the degree of victory that you have found, but on the ground of the blood of the Lamb. The discovery of this glorious secret has enabled saints down through the ages to overcome the accuser. They did not remind him of the blood of Christ. They reminded themselves. They refused to wilt before his accusations and were, therefore, able to enjoy free access to the throne of grace, and full liberty in their service. They believed that God fully accepted them.

Verses 15-19, which we won't take time now to read, simply trace for us how this cleansing is extended to the structure of the tabernacle, to the altar itself, and to the very holy of holies -- the inner sanctuary of the spirit. We are that tabernacle in which God dwells. And our whole being, our whole body, soul, and spirit, our whole life, is cleansed in God's sight by this sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf.

But now, what do you do with these evil thoughts that come to you? Here we come to the heart of this whole matter. What do you do when you kneel down to pray -- or stand up or walk about or whatever you do -- and even while you are praying some filthy thought comes across your mind? Or some hostile reaction suggests itself to you? Or even while you are trying to demonstrate love to somebody some welling up of anger or impatience comes in? What do you do with that? Your immediate temptation is to say, "Good night, what's the use? I'm trying to walk in the Spirit and even in the very process of it I feel defiled?" What do you do with these problems? Well, here is God's provision, Verses 20-22:

"And when he has made an end of atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat; and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and send him away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him to a solitary land; and he shall let the goat go in the wilderness." {Lev 16:20-22 RSV}

He sends him back to Azazel. This is very significant. You notice that all the iniquities, all the transgressions, all the sins were placed upon the head of this goat.

Both of these goats are a picture of Jesus:

In one he is represented as satisfying the heart of God on our behalf and rendering God free to love us without any restraint at all by his justice. God's justice has been satisfied. He no longer makes demands of that kind upon us. He is free to forgive us at any time and to love us.

But the second goat represents Christ as bearing the whole weight and load of our guilt, all that which the Devil tries to use as a basis upon which to ground his accusations against us. All this is to be sent back to him from whence it comes. When our Lord died he went into the wilderness of death like this goat, and returned to Satan all the accusations which he has against any believer at any time.

So what this passage is teaching us is that this is what we are to do with these accusations. In Ephesians 6 Paul calls them "the fiery darts of the wicked one" [cf, Eph 6:16", i.e., all those little suggestions to us that we really aren't accepted and loved by God, that he still has a reservation about us and that we still aren't able openly and boldly to come before his presence, and all the haunting memories of our past shame, our feelings of unworthiness, our filthy thoughts, and the flashes of fear that come upon us. What are we to do with them? Well, we are simply to put them right on the head of Jesus and say, "Lord, take them back to Satan. They don't belong to me. They are not my thoughts. They didn't originate with me. They may feel like mine but they are not. They belong to him. That is where they came from and I am sending them back. And I recognize that in your sight they are no longer taken into account in any degree, and that I stand boldly in your presence."

That is the purpose of the great Day of Atonement. It means that we are able to do as the Scriptures exhort us -- to stand and present ourselves before the Lord of Glory and, as Paul says in Romans 12, "...by the mercies of God, present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship," {cf, Rom 12:1 RSV}.

Now, you want to worship God this morning. That is what you have come to church for. Well, how do you do it? Simply by believing that he has accepted you the way you are and has already dealt with everything that is wrong -- everything -- and is now ready to use you without any hesitation whatsoever. And you are to say "Lord, here I am. I am counting on it. Thank you for it. Let's go. This is exciting! What are you going to do through me today? What are you going to do this next moment in the relationship I am entering into with this person? How are you going to handle it?" And your mind and heart can be at peace. (By the way, all this is also the clear teaching of Hebrews 10, which you can study for yourselves.)

In the rest of the chapter you will see how God confirms that he has accepted our presentation. First there is the sacrifice of the burnt offering, which is always the symbol of the total acceptance of a person by God. Then, beginning at Verse 29, he gives us the final conclusion:

"And it shall be a statute to you for ever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves, and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you; for on this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you, from all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord. It is a sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute for ever." {Lev 16:29-31 RSV}

A sabbath is a day of rest. As we have already seen from the Old Testament and the New, the sabbath is a picture of the rest of your spirit when you are counting not on what you have done, but on the work of another on your behalf -- even in this realm of all the accusations of a guilty conscience. You are to recognize that God has cleansed your conscience and you are to believe it! You are to accept that fact and return these vagrant thoughts to Satan from whence they come, send them back to him, and recognize that God is ready to use you. You can rest on that fact with a full sense of your worth in his sight, knowing that you belong to him and that he loves you fully and has taken care of everything that would exclude you from his presence. That is the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement, the fulfillment of the day of rest.

There is an old, favorite hymn which says this so beautifully. Let's read its opening words together. I hope you will read them with new perception of their significance and let them be your prayer:

Jesus, I am resting, resting
In the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness
Of Thy loving heart.
Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee,
And Thy beauty fills my soul,
For, by Thy transforming power,
Thou hast made me whole.

That is what God is after -- to make you whole, ready to work as a whole person, as an instrument of his life in you.

Prayer:

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this promise, and for the beauty of this ceremony which in Israel of old could only occur once a year but which for us is to be momentary, daily, over and over again. We are to come boldly into thy presence with joy, with hearts washed from an evil conscience, and we are to come before your presence with gladness and thanksgiving, not on our merit but on the merit of Another, that our human lives may be the sanctified instruments of a holy God at work in a lost world. How we give thanks for this and

pray that it may be our experience, not only this moment but every day of our life! We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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